

Have it made-to-measure

Creating communication and training tools exactly right for the job at hand

Communication and training are tools to help you achieve your organisation's goals. Here are some practical ways in which you can create 'made-to-measure' tools that will be exactly right for the job at hand:

Set the right starting point

Take into account what people already know – that way you won't waste resources covering old ground or switch people off by telling them old news. Identify and present the right 'hook' to get your specific audience's attention and make the information you want to deliver interesting to them.

Take into account what else is going on

Consider the context within which your learning and communication will be presented. As well as making it clear why you are delivering it, take into account other initiatives and events going on at the same time, in the recent past and in the near future. Be aware of 'initiative fatigue' – don't introduce three different initiatives if you can join them together to form one. Take advantage of any opportunities to deliver a package of messages – for example communicate your values and service standards as a part of all communication, not as something separate.

Adopt an appropriate style and approach

Just as different groups of people read different newspapers, so they prefer to receive information in different ways. People also learn differently. Sales people, for example, tend to like information that is practical and founded in real life; they also respond well to an element of competition. Consider what your audience will respond best to and build this into your plan.

Use real life examples

Don't communicate a generic message when you can make it specific. The more relevant a message seems to day-to-day work and to the individual, the more compelling it will be. People may nod sagely at theoretical advice, but it's soon forgotten. Use everyday examples based on real life in your business to make the theory meaningful and memorable. If your people need to comply with legal guidelines, for example, don't just tell them what the law is, give them examples of what working within the law looks like.

Involve people in development

When people are involved in the development of materials, they feel more ownership – they are less likely to feel that an initiative is being imposed on them and to resent any extra work. Ask for your audience's input as early as possible and ask representatives to test materials before they are distributed. Involvement of the audience in development kick starts an initiative by building understanding of objectives and also ensures that your communication is as effective as possible. If you bring in off-the-shelf materials, you may well find them left on the shelf to collect dust by people who feel the information they contain has nothing to do with them.

Choose media that will work in your business

Don't buy off-the-shelf training videos if there aren't the facilities for people to watch them. If people are pushed for time, don't expect them to read reams of information. Only use e-learning if people are comfortable with it and have easy access to the technology. If this isn't the case but you still want to use it, fill the gaps before you deliver the learning materials. Don't rely on group sessions if work patterns make it impossible to get people together. However, do remember that people generally respond best to face-to-face communication, so try to find a way to deliver this in a way that suits your organisation.

Why your communication and training tools should be made-to-measure

- They will be relevant and specific
- They will be real and practical, not theoretical
- They will be more compelling
- They will be more user-friendly
- They will be 'owned' by the people inside your organisation
- They will reflect and promote your values, priorities and ways of working
- They will build on previous work; they won't 'reinvent the wheel'

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Zero-21 is a consultancy that improves what and how you communicate – enabling you to bring your ideas to life and get the results you want. The person behind Zero-21 is Lynn Fraser, a writer and communication consultant with over 15 years' experience in corporate identity, marketing, selling, internal communication and training.



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